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HOUSE OF THE DEVIL

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DELPECHE

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THE HARDCOVER COLLECTION

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CATWOMAN: RULES OF THE LAND
PART 1

TORUNN GRØNBEKK SCRIPT
MARIANNA IGNAZZI ART
PATRICIO DELPECHE COLORS
STEVE WANDS LETTERS
SEBA FIUMARA COVER
FRANK CHO, LEE BERMEJO VARIANT COVERS
DAVID NAKAYAMA ARTIST SPOTLIGHT VARIANT COVER
NOOBOVICH 1:25 VARIANT COVER
FRANK CHO 1:50 VARIANT COVER
JAMES REID ASSISTANT EDITOR
ARIANNA TURTURRO EDITOR
ROB LEVIN GROUP EDITOR

somewhere in europe.
ten years ago.

He watches her.

Silently observing a master at work.

That is how he makes her feel--

She's all yours, *Shota.*

No... you go ahead.

--brilliant.

Shota's admiration means something.

All that work for this little thing.

Mm-hmm... It is several centuries old--

--it took years to make.

It does not come easily.

It tells a love story.

A *tragic* one.

Look--

--if you twist, the two lovers move through the world, searching for the other--

--but they are always on opposite sides.

I...such a thing of beauty should belong to everyone. Not be locked in the vault of a rich man to spite another of his ilk.

This is...*small* of Ivan.

You could take it. Run...Give it a better home.

I could.

I could leave everything behind but *you,* Evie.

Who is there?

She wonders--

--not for the first time--

--what the Belovs have on him.

The thing is, he had it coming.

They do not talk about it--

--they never talk about it--

They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.

--the sins that keep them on a leash.

Well?

We have it, Ivan.

Good girl.

now. approaching sweden.

She hides.

The coating on her glasses reflects the infrared light from the security cameras.

A defense in a silent war, unnoticed by the people around her.

Welcome to Trelleborg.

That is precisely what she is trying to be--

--unnoticed.

It is in her clothing, her posture, and the way she meets your gaze--

--Selina Kyle tells the world to look away.

And the world complies.

The blue hair is all anyone will remember of the girl on the ferry.

Or the girl on the bus.

She blends into the gray Scandinavian autumn with ease.

HOTEL

Until she decides not to.

It has been a week since **Berlin.**

A week of careful planning.

Oh, hi! This is Clara Holland's assistant calling.

Nothing is left to chance.

I have checked Mrs. Holland in through the app, but I wanted to confirm that you had her ***extras*** ready for her arrival--

The luxurious fabrics--

--yes, the ice, too. In the bathtub, please. She will be arriving soon.

And she has several purchases waiting with the concierge, if you could have those brought up as well.

Just to confirm, as this is very important--the room overlooks the back of the hotel?

--the tasteful, logo-less bag.

Mrs. Holland is a ***Gemini,*** you see. She must wake up with the sun.

All chosen to say the same thing.

*Selina tells the night she **belongs** in the old-money world of Stockholm--*

--that she belongs in his world.

I am sorry.

For what, *Ivan?*

I am sorry you thought this was a ...*negotiation.*

I suppose, in some ways, everything is. But--

--he who wishes to fight must first count the cost.

Have you counted the cost, ***Hugo?***

Well, ***yeah***...that's the problem. It ***costs*** too [redacted] much. Can't move the merchandise.

No, no, no. Have you counted the cost of coming here, to ***my house,*** and going back on your word.

The men working for him know the subtle shifts in Ivan's voice.

Hey now--don't give me that *Art of War* [redacted]. You might wear Italian shoes, but you're still a ***drug dealer,*** just like the rest of us.

Oh no.

They already know it will be a long day.

HRKKK

HK-HK--hHHH

Mr. Belov... the party.

The caterers are here. The house is full. The guests will be arriving soon.

They know it is not the last of Ivan's anger.

Saved by the...salmon tartar.

Hhhrkkk

The shipments will proceed as planned. Make sure he understands.

And someone will have to pay tonight.

Hunting is a waiting game.

This is strange country, ***Tinsel.***

Everyone is so aggressively ***subdued.*** Like it's a point of honor.

Mm-hmm. And then summer comes, and they all lose their [redacted].

IRKALLA

And that is what they are--

The Halloween party is at the mansion--right down there. But it's apparently hard to get in.

I expect a lot of people to hang around Ivan's club in the hopes of an ***invitation.***

That place? Doesn't look like much.

--hunters.

It doesn't need to, ***Gogol.*** It's the most exclusive club in the city.

But the townhouse is a ***fortress*** compared to the club. Easier to get in there.

Anton and Adam are on the move.

It is more art than science.

Mm-hmm...With all those guests and staff running around today...If I were here, I'd try to get in ***there.*** I wonder if we should set up across the street.

Get closer to the townhouse.

Do you think Evie is here to ***kill*** Ivan?

They have set their bait--

--so now they watch--

Doesn't matter. We'll kill her first.

--and wait.

It is lonely on the run.

She does not know who to trust--

Hey, **Suzy.** Are you still at the safe house? All quiet?

Evie! Thank god! All quiet here. Where are you?

Just reached **Malmö**...I'm going to check out Ivan's warehouses.

Malmö? I thought you were going to Stockholm? Trying to find the key and every-thing...

--so, she does not.

I don't know what I'm doing yet. I'm still in rough shape. I need to take it slow for a couple of days before I do anything.

But how do you know it's not here? In the warehouses?

*Well, I don't **know** know. But I'm pretty sure the key is in Ivan's townhouse.*

I think he built a safe into the bookcase in his office. Might be worth checking out.

Interesting... I'll try to get there by next week.

Can you pull the blueprints for me before then?

I already did. I put them on the server for you.

Ah, thanks, Suzy. Do you know what I'll find *here*--?

In Malmö? It's Ivan's direct connection to Poland and the other eastern states.

He likes to brag about all the art and antiques he deals in--

--but the **money** is in drugs...and, well, people. I'd stay clear of the containers.

What does he run through Stockholm?

Ivan doesn't foul his nest. Might be some drugs there, but he keeps his house relatively clean.

It is not all a lie.

Thanks, Suzy. I have to run. Be safe--I'll call you later.

Selina Kyle is in rough shape.

But tonight is too good an opportunity to miss out on.

Ivan...? Is something wrong?

Family matters.

There is...*folly afoot.*

Did something happen?

No. ***Nothing.*** The silence is staggering.

'Tis the peace before the fury. Hush before havoc. Pause before the pandemonium.

I can ***feel*** it.

I think you will be pleased with the guest list today. It is already a full house...everyone is eager to see you.

Mm-hmm. I'm going to change now.

Remember, security at every entrance ***all night.*** No slacking off come morning.

And make sure there are enough women tonight.

And ***Anton!***

No [redacted] influencers.

IRKALLA

You cannot walk into trouble in Stockholm.

You have to know where to go.

And you need an invitation.

Status--

Kom in.

Tack, snälla.

--or beauty.

Translation mode active.

The translation lags ever so slightly.

Som förriga året... Like last year--

--oh, right, you *weren't* there. I *forgot.*

And it delivers the casual cruelty with honest clarity.

You need to know, like, a code to get in. It's very cool.

What does it mean anyway? The hope thing?

Well, it's from *The Divine Comedy...*

Yet it gives her what she came for.

But Anton only lets the ***hot ones*** enter. And they need to be in costume. Ivan expects everyone to make an effort.

What exactly are ***you*** supposed to be?

I'm... it's from an ***anime.***

A way in.

Oh, of course...I thought you were a ***rag doll.***

Or a blow-up one.

Are you coming, girls? It's getting late. Ivan does his big entrance at midnight.

Hey! ***YOU!***

No selfies, tonight, okay?

Wait!

...who knows how long it--

...

--Tinsel, I have eyes on target. Alley.

Don't.

SHNIP

Silence.

He takes the hit without uttering a noise.

The sound of a true professional.

They have followed her from Berlin--

You.

--yet they seem surprised to see her.

STICK

Who hired you?

Someone either guessed she would be here--

--or someone told them she would.

CLANK

She pushes the thought from her mind--

--focusing on the fight.

If you shoot me, she falls.

Tell me who hired you.

No.

Fine.

GSHVIPP

She does not scream.

Then, the silence is broken by the sound of crushing bones.

CRKK

Her spine, Selina thinks--

--and walks away.

Somewhere in the distance, she hears the involuntary scream of a brother watching his sister bleed out.

Ye who enter here--

Abandon all hope.

The women are inspected--

Welcome.

--appreciated--

--and let through.

Camouflaged by their beauty--

Camilla! Here!

--their gender.

And as so many times before--

--Selina feels a prick of contempt for them--

Welcome, kitty. Welcome to hell.

--these men who see no threat in her.

Ivan Belov.

He has come into his own over the past decade.

Midway upon the journey of our life--

--I found myself within a forest dark--

--for the straightforward path had been lost.

Is that like... from the Bible or something?

Yet he remains an insufferable [redacted].

Welcome, my friends.

There you are.

Evie? That can't be you... surely?

You're supposed to be *dead.*

TO BE CONTINUED.

JOIN US, METAMANIACS, AND LEARN...

METAMORPHO

THE ELEMENT MAN

#1 PREVIEW

Writer AL EWING Art STEVE LIEBER
Colors LEE LOUGHRIDGE Letters FERRAN DELGADO

ACCESSING THE METAMORPHO FILE...

...HERE'S ALL THE DATA STAGG HAS!

NATURALLY, HE KNOWS WHO THE ELEMENT MAN IS AND HOW HE CAME TO BE...

...BUT THE FOOL HAS NO UNDERSTANDING OF METAMORPHO'S TRUE PURPOSE--

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ADVENTURER!

DISTRUSTFUL DAD!

PYRAMID PERIL!

MUTAGENIC METEOR!

FABULOUS FREAK!

SUPER COLD FREON

--OR THAT OF THE OTHERS!

SO WE CAN MOVE TO PHASE III...

YEAH?

DO TELL, MYSTERY MAN!

I...I'M HEARING THINGS!

THE METAMORPHO FILE... SPOKE?!

JAVA AIN'T THE ONLY GUY STAGG'S GOT GUARDING THE NEW DIGS! 'COURSE, I CAN GUARD IT AS AN INVISIBLE CLOUD OF PURE OXYGEN!

I COULDA STOPPED YOU AT THE DOOR, BUT I FIGURED OL' STAGGSY MIGHT WANNA KNOW JUST WHAT YOU WERE UP TO...

...SO I SLIPPED AHEAD TO FIND OUT...

...AS AN EXTRA LAYER OF GLASS ON THE MONITOR SCREEN!

SO LET'S HEAR IT, CHUCKLES! WHO ARE YA? WHAT'S WITH THE PUDDLE BIT? WHO'S Cy.C.L.O.P.S.?

AND WHAT'S PHASE III...?

PHASE III IS ME... MISTER 3!

AND PHASE III BEGINS...

TO BE CONTINUED IN
METAMORPHO: THE ELEMENT MAN #1
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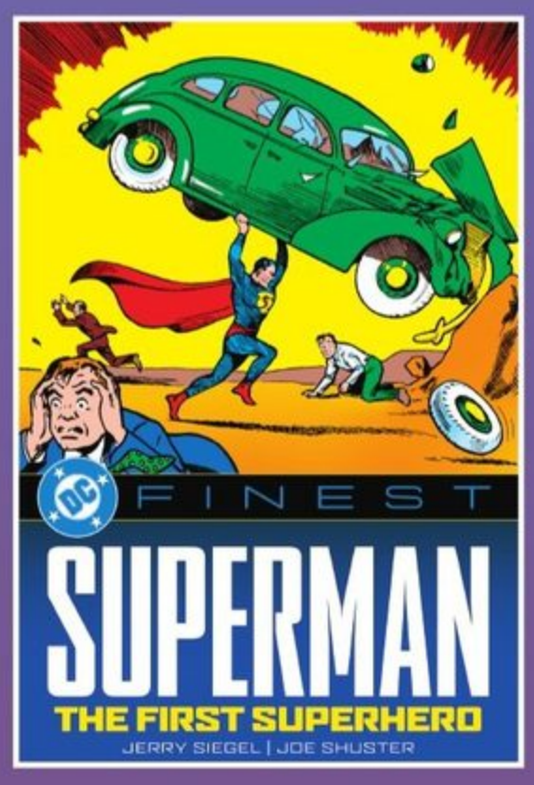

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variant cover by Santa Fung

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